



# How to Prepare for a Hurricane

**Five Parts:** [Once You Hear That A Hurricane May Be Coming Your Way](#) [In the Event You Decide to Evacuate](#) [In the Event You Decide to Stay](#)  
[At the Beginning of Hurricane Season](#) [Throughout the Year](#)

Hurricane season (usually lasting from June 1st through November 30th in the Atlantic basin) can be a nerve-racking time for everyone. Hurricanes are not only a concern for those whose homes are in the path of one, but for relatives and friends who may worry about those people. Preparedness is not just essential for dealing with the physical challenges of hurricane season, but having a plan will help you and your loved ones keep their peace of mind during this stressful time.

Part  
1

## Once You Hear That A Hurricane May Be Coming Your Way

- 1 Keep in mind that many hurricanes are slow movers.** Once you hear about it, chances are you have several days to finalize your plans. Avoid letting your guard down or taking things too leniently, however, as hurricanes have been known to pick up speed or shift course unexpectedly.
- 2 Be sure to gather food and water, because a hurricane may last for a while.** Canned food is the only kind acceptable for an event such as a hurricane; again, make sure the food is fresh.
  - Cook all raw meats in your refrigerator and freeze them. They will help keep the other food cold and you can take them out one at a time for meals that do not require cooking.
  - Try getting canned food that doesn't require any added water or milk, such as Progresso.
  - If you decide to stay at home, fill up the bathtub. An average bathtub full of water holds enough water for about three days. It also makes it possible to flush the toilet using a bucket.
  - There is much water in the hot water heater of your home. An average 150 liter water heater has enough water to keep a single person alive for a month. See [here](#) for details.
  - An average person needs about 3.5 l of water (one gallon) per day. Pets (dogs) need about 1.75L of water per day. Cats need much less water.
  - Make sure that you have a BBQ and lots of charcoal or propane so that you can cook and heat foods for meals. Small propane bottles can also serve as heat and light sources.
  - Put all the ice that you have in your freezer into plastic bags. Fill all spaces in your freezer with bags of ice. Freeze water bottles, too.
- 3 Prepare your fridge and freezer.** Eat perishables first in anticipation of the power going out. Fill your fridge and freezer with bottled water and sealed non-perishable items. The more full your freezer is, the more items there are to retain the cold and keep the overall temperature down. The same applies to the refrigerator.
  - Store as much water and fluids as you can in your fridge so that if the power goes out, it will retain the cold longer; hopefully in time for the power to turn back on.
  - See [How to keep foods frozen during a power failure](#) for more details.
- 4 Be sure you are well supplied with any prescription drugs that you or your family take on a regular basis.** This can be a daunting task as some insurers will not honor refills until the last refill is nearly used up or has run out. If necessary, drugs must be purchased without insurance; weeks may go by without the ability to get refills, putting your health (or even your life) at risk.
- 5 Put all of your valuables into clear plastic bags or high off the floor.** This should further insure that they stay dry in case of flooding.
- 6 Stay on top of the news.** How often you watch the Weather Channel is up to you, but if you start to feel overwhelmed or panicky, turn it off. You can always turn the news back on when you feel better.

- Ask a trusted neighbor to let you know when a hurricane will likely head your way so you can be informed when news watching is absolutely vital. It may be a good idea to evacuate your area beforehand, since traffic will be a problem during a mandatory evacuation order.

**7 Decide whether or not you will evacuate.** It's best to get out of town before it becomes mandatory, or even recommended. If you wait until the last minute, an hour will have passed before you get out of your driveway.

- You should evacuate if...
  - You live in a mobile home or RV. They are unsafe even in a Category 1 storm
  - You live in a high-rise building. Winds are stronger at higher altitudes, and this will cause the building to sway.
  - You live near an area prone to storm surge. Check that the house will not flood by storm surge and/or waves.

Inform your family and friends about your decision. They will rest easier if they know what you plan to do and why.

## Part 2 In the Event You Decide to Evacuate

**1 Determine when and how you will evacuate.** If you don't have a car, don't be too proud to ask others for help. If you do, leaving at an off-hour such as 2am is the best way to assure minimal traffic.

**2 Consult a map in accordance to the advice given on the news.** For example, if you live in Florida or Louisiana and the hurricane is said to be heading northwest, you'll want to have a route that heads northeast or north, whichever one is safer and shorter.

- Contact any friends or family that you may need to stay with during this time. Let them know that you are coming.

**3 Pack your car.** Stock it not only with necessities such as food (which should be in your Hurricane Preparedness Kit) clothing and medicine, but photos and important papers such as birth certificates and shot records leaving (don't forget about your pets' shot records!), pack things that you would not want to be without both for your time away from home and in the event all is lost.

- A good rule of thumb is to plan about a week's worth of away-time (don't forget the laundry soap, etc. just in case it's longer). Choose carefully. You presumably have a limited amount of space in your vehicle and space for humans is needed too.
- Make sure you have spare oil and consider taking an extra gas tank if you can safely carry one on or in your vehicle (gas stations on evacuation routes sometimes run out of gas).

**4 Protect your home and yard and then leave as far in advance of landfall as is possible and prudent.** (For steps on protecting the home, see below).

**5 Have cash on hand.** If you will be staying with friends, family, or in a hotel (don't count on it, have a back up plan even if you've made reservations ahead of time) withdraw sufficient cash for two weeks.

- ATMs and banks may not be operating in the aftermath of a major hurricane and some credit card machines will be down.
- If you expect to be displaced, a family of four needs approximately \$500 to last a week if you'll be staying in hotels. You'll need less than that if you will be staying with friends, relatives or in a shelter.

**6 Make sure your cell phone and extra cell phone batteries (get them if you do not already have some) are charged before leaving or before the power can go out.** You can charge them up with the power from your car if you have a DC to AC converter.

**7 Stay calm and collected, especially when you are around little kids who might easily get scared when their**

**parents are stressed out.** Around small children, make the hurricane preparation/evacuation into an unexpected vacation or adventure.

**8 Double-check for last minute details.** Make sure that everything is in order, to the best of your ability, before you leave.

- Is the power, gas, and water turned off?
- Do you have everything you need? Did you bring all your pets along?
- Is the first driver well-rested or would another couple of hours of rest do him or her a world of good? Leaving at 4am instead of 2am if you need to will still keep you out of the main flow of traffic, so there's no need to rush since any driver needs to stay on top of things especially during an evacuation.

Part  
3

### In the Event You Decide to Stay

**1 Take responsibility for your decision.** Before you decide you will not evacuate, accept full responsibility for that decision. Many times people disobey warning signs or evacuation orders thinking that if something bad happens they will be rescued.

- In addition to folks winning the Darwin Award this way, emergency services personnel (a "scarce resource" during a disaster) are put unnecessarily into harm's way. Many potential rescuers have died or been injured in their attempts to rescue people. It is much safer to prepare and follow warnings.
- If you are told to evacuate and decide not to do it, acknowledge your responsibility for your decision, and do not expect to be rescued later.

**2 Take all measures to protect your home and property.** It is not only your stuff you are protecting but yourself and your family who have stayed behind.

- If you have removable hurricane shutters, try to put them up at least two days before landfall. Holding a 25-pound aluminum shutter while balancing on a ladder in 74 mph winds is no fun and can lead to bad things. If you are using plywood, get your wood and nails early.
- There is a slight risk of less-than-ideal folks wandering around the neighborhood possibly looking for an empty home to rob. Lock all doors and windows, place heavy, opaque drapes in front of windows to prevent outside eyes from looking in, and if you have them and if you live in the US, load up on several rounds of ammunition for your rifles, shotguns, handguns, and pistols prior to the hurricane's arrival. Advertise that there are weapons in the vicinity. Don't try this in Canada though -- you'll get arrested.

**3 Move into your home or garage all pots, patio furniture, grills and anything else that can blow around.** Do not sink any furniture into a swimming pool, this is an old myth and a very bad idea.

**4 Make a list of everything you will need if you are stranded and without power for two weeks.** See "Things You'll Need" below.

**5 Designate a "safe room in case your home's integrity is compromised.** The "safe room" should have no windows or exterior doors and preferably only one interior door.

- Bring in a mattress to lean upright against the door and pre-stock it with a radio, batteries, flashlight and enough food, water and pre-moistened napkins to last 12 hours. Make sure all household members know that they are to run to this room once the wind starts rushing into the home. All pets, if you have them, must go here too during the hurricane. Keep any equipment your pet may need, i.e. water or cat litter, in this room too. If you think you might have difficulty getting your pet(s) into this room if it becomes necessary, have treats or toys on hand to entice them.
- If the hurricane is only Category 2 or lower, you will not likely need to go into a "safe room" in the center of your house. However it is a wise idea to keep away from large windows or board them up just the same. Note that for buildings made from steel and/or reinforced concrete may survive stronger hurricanes than wooden buildings.

- 6 Stay as far away from windows and doors from the moment of landfall.** If the power has gone out, listen for wind and rain that will steadily increase as the hurricane nears.
- 7 Extinguish all candles once the rain and winds reach thunderstorm levels.** This is to assure they are not accidentally left lit when and if the winds start whipping through your home.
  - A safe way to use candles is to put them in a saucepan, deeper than the candle is high, with shiny sides. The light will reflect off the ceiling and inside of the pot, and the candle will be protected from being knocked over. An inch or so of water in the pot isn't a bad idea, either.
  - However, if you smell gas, hear gas, or even suspect a gas leak, do not use candles. Use light sticks.
- 8 Keep a radio on as the hurricane approaches.** Often, the major radio stations will have special coverage in the local programs if a hurricane is coming.

**Part  
4****At the Beginning of Hurricane Season**

- 1 Double-check to ensure the supplies in your Hurricane Preparedness Kit are both well-stocked and fresh.** Inflate air beds to ensure they don't need patching or replacing. Check expiration dates on canned foods. Use a battery tester so you know they will work when you need them to (most batteries have a tester already attached to the package, but you can buy one separately if you want to).
- 2 Recognize that your hot water heater contains 50 to 75 gallons of fresh drinking water.** The water in a hot water tank can keep one person alive and healthy for more than a month.
  - Attach a garden hose to the drain valve. Run water out of the tank to remove any built up sediment that has collected at the bottom of the tank.
  - To get the water out of the tank after a storm you will need to open the plumbing system by opening any hot water faucet in the house. This will release the vacuum in the tank. You must turn off the electrical breaker to the hot water tank or unplug it to prevent damage if the electricity is restored before water service.
- 3 Purchase a generator.** Generally, a generator should be big enough to run your refrigerator, a lamp or two, any fans, and any special durable medical equipment needed by a member of your family. If your family does have special health or medical needs, or you absolutely must have air conditioning, be prepared to pay handsomely for a generator that can handle it. The best option in this latter case is to have the generator wired into your home power so the generator will start when the power goes out. Taking this precaution is even more important if only one person in the home knows how, or is strong enough, to start the generator. Search the web for generator wattage calculators to make sure you don't buy more generator than you need - your wallet will thank you at the gas pump.
  - Purchase several 5-gallon gas cans. Fuel is usually scarce after a hurricane, and many stations even limit the amount of gas you can purchase after waiting in line. Having multiple cans will allow you to stock up. Buy a bottle of fuel stabilizer for when the power is restored. Mix this with your gas so that it will keep until you are able to use it. Also, fill and run your generator with the mixture for about 10 minutes so that the fuel system does not gum up while in storage. Change the oil and/or filter before you store it, that way it's nice and fresh next season.
  - If you already have a generator, make sure it is in working order before hurricane season. There is nothing worse than finding out that your generator investment needs repairs after you need to use it.
  - If you are unable to purchase a generator, buy a DC to AC converter for your car. With it you will use your car as a portable electric generator. They cost \$25 to \$100 and are available in the automotive section of department stores. If you should lose power to your house, you will be able run a radio, TV, light, refrigerator, or other low wattage appliances from your car. You will need a heavy duty extension cord to run the power into your house.
  - Do not run the car or any gasoline generator in the garage as the carbon monoxide poisoning could kill you.
- 4 Cut down trees close to your house, car and any other buildings, or at very least trim their branches.** If a large tree falls onto your house, it can punch a big hole in the roof. If a large tree falls onto your car, it can easily be crushed flat. Spindly evergreens are especially likely to fall in the event of a hurricane.

**5 Perform maintenance on the car you will be evacuating with if it becomes necessary.** When is the last time you changed the oil or the filter? Is the battery fully charged? Have you replaced the spare that you had to use the last time you evacuated? Since hurricane season happens during the warmer months, make sure your coolant is topped off as well.

**6 Buy a bicycle, if you don't already own one, so that you will have a backup mode of transportation.** After a big storm hits there may not be any gasoline available for days or even weeks because of power outages and the gas pumps not working.

- If your neighborhood is destroyed you will be able to go for supplies or even ride out of the area. Make certain that the bike tires are pumped up before a storm hits.
- Have an inner tube patch kit and an air pump or air compressor that runs off the battery of your car handy, as well.

**7 Watch or listen to the news to learn when a hurricane is approaching.** This will help you create a plan of action.

**8 Continue keeping in touch with your friends and family.** They will gain comfort just knowing where you are, how you are faring, and how close the storm is to you. If you are in an area that is on the outskirts of the storm, tell them. Assure them that you are all doing good.

- Remember, they only know what they are told on the TV and their imagination runs wild. If you lose your telephone power, call them at least once with your cell phone, to tell them you do not have phone service, and that you will call as soon as it is restored. This way you do not have to use up your cell phone minutes which should be saved for emergencies.

## Part 5 Throughout the Year

**1 Keep a Hurricane Preparedness Kit packed (see "Things You'll Need").** This assures that you will lessen the amount of things you'll have to do when the time comes. Remember simple things like food, medication and water.

**2 Create a "take box".** The take box should have everything you need to reconstruct your life in the event you evacuate and everything is lost. Passports; birth, wedding, adoption, divorce, and armed service separation certificates; copies of insurance policies; mortgage information; house and car title; large purchase receipts, etc.

- If you have a scanner, save yourself space and heartbreak by scanning family albums and images of other keepsakes, burn those to CD and keep a copy in your take box, or make a copy of all your pictures, videos, music and documents on an external hard drive that you can keep in your take box.
- Remember that CDs can malfunction. Make sure you take along the original documents, if possible, make copies of them. The CD is just for convenience when shown to officials.
- Be sure to take all documentation and identification related to anyone's military service, if applicable.
- If anyone in the household owns or carries firearms (US), make sure that you have all the appropriate permits and documentation stored in the take box.

**3 Discuss and practice a disaster plan with your family.** One of the most important lessons from hurricane Katrina to make sure everyone in the family knows who to contact (and how to contact them) as an out of area contact.

- Make sure kids know enough information so that an adult can get in touch with that person should sudden evacuation be necessary when you aren't near them. Practice this, and make other back up plans. If you have young children, you might like to write important contact information on an index card and give it to them in case they are somehow separated from you. If your older children have cell phones, make sure that your contact information and any other important contact information are programmed into their contact list/speed dials.
- This can be as involved as you like, but keep in mind the ages and temperaments of individuals to assure everything runs smoothly in the event you have to evacuate immediately. See Tips below for examples on how to do a run-through.

**4 Learn how to turn off the gas and power to your home and make sure that all tools needed for the job are easily accessible.** If you're not sure, speak with the gas or electric company for instructions. You don't want to be running around at the last minute trying to figure out how to do these things.

**5 Ensure that insurance matters are kept up to date.** Hurricane season is not the time to buy flood insurance since it's either unavailable or outrageously expensive. Note: most regular home insurance does not include flood coverage in the policy, so you'll have to buy this separately.

**6 Make plans to stay with friends, if possible.** Keep in touch with friends and family that are out of the potential disaster area, and make arrangements to stay with them, in case you have to evacuate.

**7 Remove dead trees and brush.** Have an arborist remove dead trees and dead tree limbs and evaluate the health of any trees near enough to fall on your (or your neighbor's) house.

## Community Q&A

### How do hurricanes look?

 You can't see them. Look on the web to see pictures of them from an aerial view.  
Flag as duplicate Not Helpful 4 Helpful 16

### Why is a hurricane shelter underground?

 It is underground because strong winds can knock down the walls of an above ground structures.  
Flag as duplicate Not Helpful 5 Helpful 14

### What about stuffed animals and pets?

 Take your pets. If you have enough room (and the time) take a couple of stuffed animals, if they mean a lot to you.  
Flag as duplicate Not Helpful 4 Helpful 9

### Can I go in a closet?

 Yes. In fact, it is one of the safest places in a house. The basement is not safe due to the possibility of flooding.  
Flag as duplicate Not Helpful 5 Helpful 7

### What can I do if I live less than 100 miles from shore?

 Evacuate if possible. If that isn't possible, apply hurricane shutters and protect your property from flooding with sandbags.  
Flag as duplicate Not Helpful 4 Helpful 6

### Do I need to do anything to the swimming pool?

 No.  
Flag as duplicate Not Helpful 11 Helpful 7

## Tips

- Communication and teamwork is key. Stick together, work together and heed the instructions of safety officials.

- You can pick up a car refrigerator for under \$50. It runs off your car battery. Though not large, a car fridge can store at least a day's preparations and may of course be refilled as needed.
- If you are really low on fresh water and need to get some right away, you can make a solar still. To do this you dig a hole in the ground, put a large pot of saltwater or undrinkable water inside it, put a small container inside the pot, cover everything over with a garbage bag and put a weight in the middle. The water in the small container will be clean and drinkable.
- Fill your bathtub up before the hurricane if you plan to stay, to assure you'll have a supply of water for flushing the toilet, drinking and cooking, etc.
- Do not use a flush toilet if there's no water in the tank to flush it. The waste left there will produce a smell that is most unpleasant in your home. Each flush takes over a gallon of water. Instead, you can line the bowl with a garbage bag and then use it to remove the waste from the home.
- Make sure you take children's (if you have them) things, too, such as books, stuffed animals, etc.
- A 5 gallon bucket lined with a garbage bag makes a good emergency toilet. But this method will use up a lot of garbage bags in a short amount of time; an alternative is to dig a hole in the yard and use it for an emergency toilet. You may also sprinkle cat litter in the 5 gallon bucket between uses. This will absorb liquid and allow multiple uses of a bag before removal to the outside of the house. Alternatively, men can urinate into a large sealable plastic bottle, for example a milk jug, and empty it into the toilet when it is full. This saves a lot of water.
- Remember to buy a self powering flashlight so you're not using batteries, but still buy batteries for other battery operated equipment.
- Make sure that you have enough time to get out of the danger zone, taking into account current traffic conditions based on news reports. The last thing you want is to be trapped in your car while the storm is coming ashore. Get out early by the fastest route possible.
- Stay away from flying and sharp objects.

## Warnings

- Throughout the preparatory phase and the storm itself, do not let your love of adventure overwhelm your common sense.
- The slower a hurricane moves, the more likely it'll be to include heavy rain, possibly causing floods. If a hurricane is likely to move very slowly and you live in a valley, head for higher ground. If the hurricane is moving very quickly, most of the damage will be wind related.
- Don't do what Torontonians did in 1954 when Hurricane Hazel came to town, which was disregarding the warnings. If there is a hurricane warning or watch issued for your area, believe it, no matter where you live.
- Don't get confused when the eye of the hurricane passes over. It might trick you into thinking the storm is over.
- Heed all directions of both the Red Cross and government officials.
- Remember, hurricanes can strike anywhere from the Caribbean to the Eastern coast of Canada.
- You should not think twice about leaving if: (a) you are under a mandatory evacuation order; (b) a Category 3–5 hurricane is likely and you are within 100 miles of shore; (c) you live in a manufactured home or camper and a hurricane of any strength is on its way to you; or (d) you cannot shutter or board-up your home.

## Things You'll Need

- Battery operated flashlights are fine if the power is out for a short time. The new LED flashlights work well, as long as a spotlight isn't needed. Target and other stores have good ones in the \$10 range that drop into a pocket and run on AA and AAA cells. They're great for personal lights, and the batteries last five to ten times as long as with regular incandescent flashlights. Additionally, LED conversion bulbs are available on the Internet for more popular brands of flashlights.
- After a couple of days you will need candles for light. Buy big decorative candles that will burn for days. Keep lanterns/candles in frequently used locations, such as the bathroom counter, next to the door, and on your bedroom nightstand. If there are gas leaks, explosive chemicals in your area, do not use candles. When using candles, watch them to prevent fire, especially if children are with you.
- "Self Powered Lights" and "Self Powered Radios". This equipment is either solar powered, and/or has a "crank up" generator built into the light and the radio. This will save you money on batteries. Some of these models will also charge mobile phones.
- Glow sticks. Safer than candles, in case there are gas leaks, explosive, flammable chemicals in your area.
- Solar powered garden lights. You can charge them up in the sun by day and use them indoors for lighting at night.

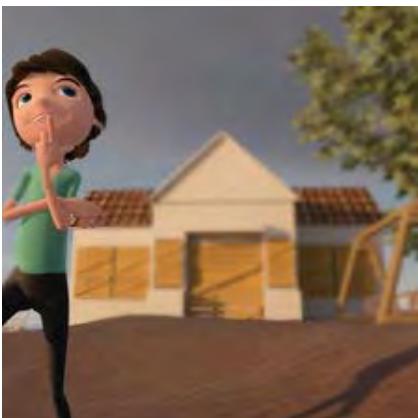
- Battery-operated radio
- Canned goods and can opener, fruits and vegetables and other foods that do not require refrigeration.
- Water (at least one gallon daily per person with a seven-day supply). You can also fill up bathtubs if you close or seal the drains.
- Bleach. In the event that water enters your home, you will need to get it out and then kill any microbes that remain.
- Take highly-valued items with you or, for those items staying in the home, wrap in plastic or place in plastic bags. Even if you are riding out the storm, consider placing photos, insurance papers and other important papers in sealed bags.
- Corded phone. Even if your electricity is out, your telephone may still work. Cordless phones still require electricity, so plug in a corded phone, and you may be surprised.
- Mobile phone, and extra charged batteries if your phone permits their use. Note that if cell phone towers are damaged or destroyed in the storm, your mobile phone may not work.
- A DC to AC inverter.
- Pre-moistened towelettes.
- Battery-powered fans will be very appreciated if the power is out.
- Lots of batteries of all sizes (you can always use later what is not used during the storm). Consider buying a car battery to power battery operated devices in the home.
- Make sure each person has their own flashlight and battery supply, in case you have to separate.
- A good supply of all prescription drugs.
- A first-aid kit.
- Optional but helpful is one pair of wading pants for each member of the family. If you live in an area prone to flooding, you do not want to be walking around with your skin exposed to contaminated water if there is a need, after the storm, to walk from the home.
- Plenty of large plastic garbage bags to dispose of human waste and other garbage.
- Supply of Toilet Paper, and other toiletries as needed.
- At least one 5-gallon bucket and cat litter (the bio-degradable kind) for toilet use.
- Pocket knife

## Sources and Citations

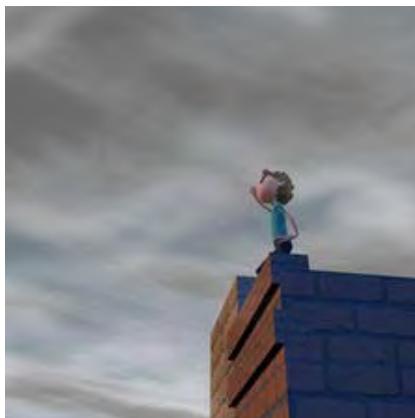
- [NOAA.gov](#) - National Weather Service's hurricane preparedness website
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